

Revised Ecosystem Roundtable Approach
November 13, 1997 Draft

The Situation:

There seems to be some consensus that the 1997 Roundtable process was successful in bringing a higher level of technical and scientific grounding to the recommendations for near-term funding. However, this process was less successful in (1) building stakeholder buy-in for the spending program and (2) coordinating across various pots of funding available for ecosystem restoration measures in the Central Valley and Bay-Delta estuary.

The Proposal:

1. Get back to the notion of a "virtual pool" of money.
2. Clarify that the Roundtable's job is to develop a recommended blueprint for action working with technical experts; make the preparation of this action plan the focus of the Roundtable's activities.
3. Expand the categories for spending beyond a request for proposals process in the blueprint for action.

The Revised Process:

A recast Ecosystem Roundtable process could follow the six steps below.

1. Assume a total amount of funding available over the period at issue (1, 2 or more years). For steps 2-3 below, the sources of those funds and the various budgetary and legal constraints on them will be ignored.
2. Convene a blue ribbon technical panel -- perhaps along the lines of the integration panel that worked together this year -- to advise on (1) ecological targets and stressors and (2) the priority actions that would best respond to these targets and stressors. The panel should rely on (at least) the ERPP and the AFRP in making its recommendations. Panel members should be compensated for their time.
3. Prepare a blueprint laying out a recommended program of spending for the time period at issue. This blueprint should include 5-8 categories of spending. For example:
 - (a) requests for proposals for specific activities;
 - (b) actions that are best undertaken by federal, state or local agencies;
 - © project or program development;¹

¹ This category would be useful where it is clear that there is a problem to address but thinking has not yet coalesced around a specific action item.

(4) reserve funds for various purposes;

(5) an endowment of some kind for long term spending.

Other categories of spending may also be appropriate. The blueprint should include policy recommendations about types of spending, for example, the proportion of "on the ground" projects versus information gathering programs and the proportion of available funding that should be committed to such categories. The blueprint would be a combination of recommendations from very specific actions (e.g., issue an RFP for a fish passage facility on x tributary) to very general actions (e.g., fund an interagency task force to develop a program on toxic discharges to the San Joaquin River).

The blueprint should be prepared with the active participation of the technical advisory panel (or even a number of panels divided into geographic regions). A 2-4 day workshop may be appropriate for this task once the requisite technical information has been assembled. The Roundtable should have its own staff for this task.

4. Match the available pots of money with the proposed spending items.

This could be done by the Roundtable, or it could be accomplished by a subgroup of stakeholders and agency representatives, in the form of recommendations to the agencies with legal responsibility for funding. (This could be a section of the blueprint, or a separate document entirely.)

5. Implement the recommended spending plan.

Responsibility for this task will depend upon the action item, but implementation responsibility (e.g., getting RFPs issued and processed) will necessarily lie primarily with the parties with legal responsibility for individual funding sources. However, the Roundtable (or sub-groups of the Roundtable) should serve as the stakeholder liaison to and monitor of these processes. To the extent that non-agency funding is at issue (e.g., stakeholder contributions to Category III), the Roundtable has substantially more latitude in guiding the spending process.

6. Monitoring, reporting, etc. The Roundtable should track (a) how well its recommendations are actually implemented by CALFED and the other agencies and (b) how the various programs and projects are doing in terms of providing ecosystem benefits and information.